

THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches

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Today's Bible reading

Luke 10:1-11, 17-20 ("The Mission of the Seventy")

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near."

...

The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

Christ the Lord is risen today (CH411)

Christ is alive! let Christians sing (CH416)

Now the green blade riseth (CH417)

The day of Resurrection (CH413)

Our reading from Luke's gospel is one which contains so much detail that it is difficult to know how best to handle it. When we pause to reflect on all that Jesus is saying to that big contingent of 70 believers, we realise that there is a lot on Jesus' mind as he talks about the way ahead:

- ✦ the big building up of outreach, using 35 pairs of missionaries;
- ✦ the clear use of delegation by Jesus to enable the coverage of every town and place where he had intended to go himself;
- ✦ the recognition that these couples were like lambs in the midst of wolves (which must have been a particularly startling image for them to deal with);
- ✦ the instruction to travel light, without purse or bag or even sandals with, they must surely have noted, no reference to a comfy pillow or a fleecy blanket;
- ✦ then there is the command to bless each house they were about to visit, eating whatever might be set before them;
- ✦ and what about that bit about dealing with rejection by wiping dust off their feet as a clear and unmistakable protest?

Yes, there is so much in this short little passage that we could think about together, yet today I would like us to consider one little phrase which I left out of my list. Here is how it goes:

Remain in the same house, ... Do not move about from house to house.

There, right in the middle of a dense discussion on the strategies and tactics entailed in reaching out in faith to the wider community, we come across a clear and unmistakable mandate to build relationships. What Jesus is not saying is that his followers should put up posters on any notice board they come to. What he is not requiring is a comprehensive campaign of leafleting in which every single house in a town has a flier posted through its front door. What he is not suggesting is some great "for one night only" super-duper, razzmatazz, all-whistles-and-bells performance under a huge neon sign blaring out in flashing letters, "Jesus is Lord". No. What he is saying is just this: go to someone's home; stay in that home; don't leave and move on to another person's home, until you leave for a different town.

There is something powerful about having an unknown guest coming to stay. You will probably have your own stories to tell of the joys and the pitfalls of welcoming an unknown person into your family situation. For me, our unexpected guests tended to be artists (friends of my brother) and orchestral musicians (colleagues of my sister). And it didn't matter that my brother or my sister might be far, far away from the family home at the time. If friends were coming to Glasgow from any corner of the UK or beyond, they knew that they could come to us for a night, or a week, or in one case a lovely opera singer who stayed for a couple of months.

There is so much that is good in offering and in receiving hospitality. In a proper, simple home setting people can get to know one another over a cup of coffee or through sharing a meal together. Stories are exchanged. Jokes are told. Help is offered and received: a lift here; a visit there; a recommendation of a place to go to or a film to see. And all the while friendship is slowly and quietly built from the ground up, as a new relationship blossoms and blooms in all directions. Unknown strangers can become lifelong friends. And all because of the strong, consistent hospitality which is found there in the home environment.

It may be that you have been a host in just this kind of way. Equally, it may be that you yourself have benefited from such hospitality on arrival in a strange city or far

off land. If either of these is true, perhaps you can appreciate a little of the message which Jesus is passing on to his followers. Once again:

Remain in the same house, ... Do not move about from house to house.

If we can recognise from our own domestic experience that hospitality can truly be such a durable and engaging factor in building those lasting relational foundations, what might this truth have to teach us about the message of Jesus which Luke is pointing us to? At the very least, I would suggest that we need to look at the giving and the receiving of hospitality as a crucial element in our mission to the world.

Why? Because it is in the many wonderful processes of fostering friendships that we build that most vital of qualities, trust: the kind of trust that is open and loving and willing to grow in all sorts of ways and in all sorts of directions. Like a vine which spreads up and out until it covers a whole wall with fruitfulness, a well-nurtured friendship is a treasure far greater than gold or jewels.

We might relate well to the idea of friendship, knowing as we do just what a blessing true friends can be across the span of a lifetime. But what, I wonder, would we make of the possibility of something called "friendship evangelism"? This is a term which was quite common in churches a generation or two back, and I think that now it is something which Christians would do well to take seriously in our own time. Our reading today points us firmly in the direction of sharing the Good News of Jesus through the building up of relationships. If we get to know our neighbours as friends, and if those new friends come to trust us as positive and dependable folk, it surely follows that the bridge of friendship can also become a bridge for sharing faith both in word and in action.

Do we truly believe that the faith held out to us by Jesus Christ is important to us? If we do, does it not then follow (as day follows night) that we should make our faith open and clear and available to everyone ... not least available to our friends?

But how? Well, here is one timely thought.

Over the course of the next six months, Gladsmuir Church is staging a season of "Sing at 6.30" evening services featuring great songs of praise and wonderful organ-playing in a building with an acoustic which just glows with music. From April to September these acts of worship will be open to people of faith, but we also believe that these evenings can additionally be times when the pleasure of singing God's praise can be brought home to visitors, potentially with no church connection whatsoever.

It would be wonderful if our own church members could do something as simple and as straightforward as saying to a friend: "I'm going to 'Sing at 6.30' tonight, and I would love it if wanted to come along and 'Sing at 6.30' with me. I think you'd love the experience, and I'd be happy to take you there and bring you back, and I'd be sitting next to you so you'd have nothing to worry about."

Think about how friendship might lead us on to invitation. and how invitation might lead on to faith. In all of this I am convinced that when friends simply chat to friends about faith and life, wonderful things can and will emerge. And they will emerge in wonderful ways.

*We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
we will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love. Amen.*

Praying for others

Lord God, our heavenly Father, we pray for the peace of the world.

We pray especially for the people in Ukraine and in Gaza where war is in progress and where so many dreadful things are happening.

Even if we may not know the solutions to the terrible problems, yet we pray that you may inspire the world's leaders to cooperate so that peace may come.

We know that there are so many people in our world who are in so much need – need for food and water and shelter and peace.

We pray that the nations of the world may be generous so that aid is delivered where it is so needed.

We pray for our own country and society.

May we work together so that things become better for all our people.

We pray for the work of the National Health Service and for the work of East Lothian Foodbank.

Surely, we are grieved that there are people among us who do not have enough food for their families.

As well as our daily ordinary needs, we pray for the spiritual needs which we all have – especially the need to share and experience love, the love we bear for our friends and families and that great love which you show to us, your people.

Lord, give us hope in our hearts.

Nurture the seed of faith that it may rise in us like new wheat rising green into the spring sunlight.

These and all our prayers we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Weekly Updates ...

"Sing at 6.30" ... TONIGHT!: Be part of a lively season of come-and-sing worship events held monthly at Gladsmuir Parish Church from April to September. Each month there will be an evening service with a strong emphasis on praise and music featuring Gladsmuir's amazing instruments: our pipe organ and our theatre organ. For the 2024 season of 6:30pm services we will be starting on Sunday 14th April with "A Song of Springtime": specially for Easter we will be looking to the joy of this fresh and fabulous season. All are most welcome. Admission is free, with an offering to benefit the work of Christian Aid.

Gladsmuir Coffee and Craft Group: Fortnightly on a Wednesday from 10-11.30am in Gladsmuir Church. Come along on 17th April for the next friendly gathering. All welcome!

New Age Kurling: Tuesdays from 2-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church.

Wednesday Club: From 2.30-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church. Come along and enjoy a variety of activities and tea/coffee. (Contact Janet 07766 574123).

Sporting Memories Group: Thursdays from 10.30am - 12 noon in Room 3, Longniddry Church.